

Philosophy and History:A Reading of Conflicts and Tensions, the Case of "Paul Ricœur"

الفلسفة والتاريخ: قراءة في النزاعات والتجاذبات، "بول ريكور" نموذجاً

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Abstract:

The relationship between philosophy and history is often viewed as one of dissonance and conflict, while this article attempts to defend, through Paul Ricoeur's model, the possibility of a complementary relationship between them. This article adopts a plan that relies on a type of internal dialectics of the historical process itself, by focusing on the element of confrontation between the historian as a profession, and the philosopher of history as a mission, with the aim of identifying the most prominent conditions required by the relationship between history and philosophy in light of the epistemological complexity occurring between... fields of knowledge today, and then reach the decisive result, which is: advancing a philosophy of history that is compatible with the nature of the historical event on the one hand and with the structure of historical knowledge on the other hand.

Keywords: History; Conflict; Interlacing; Ricorur; New History.

ملخص:

ينظر في الغالب إلى العلاقة بين الفلسفة والتاريخ على أنها علاقة تنافر ونزاع ، بينما يحاول هذا المقال الدفاع ، من خلال نموذج "بول ريكور"، عن إمكانية علاقة التكامل بينهما، وذلك بالنظر إلى وفرة خيوط التجاذب بين عمل المؤرخ وبين عمل الفيلسوف. بخاصة حينما يضطر الفيلسوف إلى الاصغاء إلى لغة المؤرخ من جهة، وإلى ما يحدث ضمن العملية التاريخية نفسها. يتبنى هذا المقال خطة تعتمد على ضرب من الديالكتيك الداخلي للعملية التاريخية نفسها، من خلال التركيز على عنصر المواجهة بين المؤرخ كصاحب مهنة، وبين فيلسوف التاريخ كصاحب مهمة، وذلك بهدف الوقوف على أبرز الشروط التي تتطلبها العلاقة بين التاريخ والفلسفة في ظل التعقيد الإبستمولوجي الحاصل بين حقول المعرفة اليوم ، ومن ثم الوصول إلى النتيجة الحاسمة وهي: النهوض بفلسفة للتاريخ تتوافق مع طبيعة الحدث التاريخي من جهة ومع بنية المعرفة التاريخية من جهة ثانية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التاريخ؛ النزاع؛ التجاذب؛ ريكور؛ التاريخ الجديد

Introduction:

The intellectual framework of French historiography at the end of the 20th century, despite growing questions about historical practice and the conditions of producing historical knowledge, remains marked by a paradoxical relationship between history and philosophy. This relationship has not resulted in mutual

dialogue despite their interdependence. Professional historians have often viewed philosophy with suspicion, fearing its influence on historical knowledge, which is perceived as secondary compared to figures like Spengler, Toynbee, Hegel, or Carlyle. According to Jacques Le Goff, this mistrust persists in contemporary French historical thought.

This mistrust among historians has limited the influence of the philosophy of history in the historical writings of figures like Taine and Raymond Aron in the 19th century. These historians found no relevance in the questions raised by philosophy, often considering these debates futile and meaningless, arguing that any philosophical intrusion into history negates history itself. For these professionals, philosophy presents itself in two forms concerning history: either as a history of philosophy or as a philosophy of history, but these traditional frameworks no longer align with contemporary developments in the understanding and construction of history.

It might have been possible for the history of philosophy to serve as a meeting point between history and philosophy if historians of philosophy adhered to the norms of historical practice defined by professional historians. However, in the French context, the philosophical writing of the history of philosophy is perceived by professional historians as a closed activity, limited by the belief that philosophy has its own history and life, which hinders any fruitful interaction with actual historical facts.

Thus, the distrust of professional historians towards the history of philosophy stems from their attachment to a Hegelian conception of philosophical history, where the convergence between the history of philosophy and philosophical practice remains limited. They view historians of philosophy not as historians in the conventional sense, but as philosophers dealing with fundamental questions often detached from historical reality.

The field of the philosophy of history has maintained its uniqueness despite post-World War II developments. It does not conform to usual historiographical standards because it is purely philosophical, attributing intrinsic value to historical subjects. This kind of approach is unfamiliar to traditional French historians. The gap between history in the strict sense and philosophical history in France has widened, notably due to the disregard for epistemological theories in historical research, which limits the understanding of the complex

connections between historical representations in philosophical and scientific domains.

1.The "New History" versus the "Philosophy of History":

Historians' approach to the philosophy of history, according to Hegel, is marked by a profound separation. Hegel clearly distinguished total history, moral history, philological history, etc., from "philosophical history," which is based on concepts like necessity, universality, and finality. However, modern historians, such as Marc Bloch and François Furet, adopt a critical caution towards these Hegelian postulates because total history requires continuous metaphysical reflection, which neither aligns with the methodological complexities of historical writing nor with new philosophical challenges, particularly those of historical time according to the new historical paradigm.

Despite the tensions between historians and philosophers, notably Foucault, De Certeau, and Ricoeur, a "new methodological discourse" in history is emerging, breaking away from the Hegelian total conception of history. These thinkers do not blindly follow professional historians but critique their work, proposing a historical epistemology that goes beyond mere methodological frameworks to question historical truth and the communication between historical epistemology and the hermeneutics of history, especially with Paul Ricoeur.

2.The Crisis of The "New History" and the Reactivation of the Philosophy of History:

Rethinking philosophical discourse on the "new history," outside the Hegelian framework, aligns with significant shifts in the methodological framework of historiography. These shifts are exacerbated by a "theoretical crisis" in the pursuit of a unified theoretical model, which serves as a guiding principle for historical writing among advocates of the "new history," especially in France. Contemporary historians are now confronted with novel and unprecedented subjects, problems, and methodologies in their writing. This necessitates a fresh philosophical challenge for historians—not to uncover the definitive meaning of history, but rather to explore the boundaries of theoretical advancements in shaping historical narratives and the historian's role. In this context, this philosophy embodies a more modest ambition compared to grand historical

philosophies like Hegelian philosophy of history or the philosophical approaches prevalent among early twentieth-century scholars and historians, such as those found in the work of the esteemed historian Toynbee in "A Study of History," which has been met with critical reception among historians since its inception (Geoffrey Barraclough, 1984, p. 281).

The philosophy of history in its modest form, especially under the influence of the *Annales*, no longer aspires to provide a global scheme to capture the ultimate meaning of history or to discover the laws of historical cycles. It is now often said that any attempt at structured historical synthesis or the discovery of its ultimate meaning is "technically impossible" given the wealth of information available to historians today (*ibid.*, p. 284). For Ricœur, this new philosophy of history seeks instead to "reengage" philosophical reflection on the question of history from a hermeneutic point of view, that is, an epistemological perspective of historical writing (Ricœur, 1978, pp. 318-336).

This change in the relationship between history and philosophy has particularly caught the attention of Paul Ricœur, who observes how a new cognitive system of history is forming, radically opposing the Hegelian presuppositions of philosophical history. This new system prefers to work with rhythms of discontinuity, differentiation, and multiple levels of analysis, thereby reconstructing the very notion of the event under the influence of the French "new history" (Braudel, 1969, p. 13).

Foucault, in his introduction to "The Archaeology of Knowledge," identified the essential features of this new theoretical paradigm (Foucault, 2005, p. 5),

which breaks away from traditional epic conceptions of individual and collective history. This revolution has served as a "new paradigm" for the writing of history, and even for the humanities as a whole.

From this perspective, Ricœur wonders if history can remain historical while being close to other human sciences and creating its own systems of rationality (Ricœur, 1983, p. 196). He thus questions the possibility of a renewed philosophical engagement in the making of history and in the profession of the historian, seeking to restore confidence in a new form of philosophical intervention. It is precisely in this path that the value of Ricœur's work lies,

adding to the fundamental critical efforts in the field of the philosophy of history in France, often on the margins of the German tradition of "understanding" (Verstehen), which he himself describes as "almost foreign to the main current within French historiography" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 171).

3. "Paul Ricœur" and the Profession of Historian: an Early Dialogue:

From his early writings on "History and Truth" to his key work on the trilogy "Memory, History, Forgetting" (Ricœur, 2009), Paul Ricœur has continuously engaged in a lively and fruitful dialogue with historians. Through works such as "Time and Narrative," he consistently interrogates history in light of his philosophical, epistemological, ontological, and ethical concerns. For Ricœur, history is a methodical construction aimed at "naming what is no longer" or what has become other, thereby engaging the problematic of self and other, an ethical question he seeks to philosophically address in his project of "small ethics" titled "Oneself as Another" (Ricœur, 2005).

On the other hand, the historian's past becomes their "present past," urging them to turn towards an "absent present," now sharing only a sense of debt with those with whom they no longer share. Finally, according to Ricœur, the historian must distinguish between two levels of subjectivity often conflated: a "well-constituted" subjectivity and a "deficient" subjectivity, in order to reduce the temptations of objectivism in historical writing, thus opposing proponents of structural history who exclude the human and human values (Ricœur, 1967, p.50).

4. Philosophy, History, and the Legitimacy of Dialogue:

In France, the reconciliation between philosophy and history has long been problematic due to historians' orientation towards paradigmatic practices specific to the social sciences, thereby distancing grand philosophies of history. Nevertheless, significant space remains for a fruitful dialogue between philosophy and history, facilitated by several factors. Firstly, this relationship is influenced by the challenges of a historical present unable to overcome its crises, prompting a widespread uncertainty about the future, conducive to a nostalgic and stagnant resurgence of the past at the expense of prospective reinvention (Pomian, 1999, p.23).

Secondly, hermeneutical approaches such as structuralism, functionalism, and Marxism have failed to explain the contradictions in recent Western history. This has led to new and unprecedented skeptical experiences, compelling historians to adopt philosophical methods of reflection and to deeply interrogate meanings within the framework of history. Paul Ricœur illustrates how a philosopher has been able to influence historical activity from the 1950s through the late 1990s, with his major work on memory, history, and forgetting at the beginning of the 21st century (Ricœur, 2000).

From the outset, Ricœur noted that historical work rests on complex epistemological dualities that make it difficult to separate the objective from the subjective, interpretation from understanding. This always implies a dialectical relationship between the self and the distant other in time, and a critical understanding of historical situations within contemporary linguistic contexts. As Aron (1938) emphasized, historical language is as prone to ambiguity as historical reality itself (p.102).

For Ricœur, what distinguishes history is its ultimate humanistic grounding in the overall historical process, as an exploration of everything that pertains to humanity (Dosse, 2008, p.223). Therefore, a historian cannot afford to ignore what might serve the higher interests of humanity in the name of a fallacious objectivity, an objectivity that only serves empty structures devoid of human values (Dosse, 2008, p.43).

Thus, Ricœur firmly established an ethical dimension in historical practice, emphasizing the historian's need to fully engage with their subject to avoid the trap of illusory objectivity. They must navigate between the positioned stance and scientific ambition and the personal perspective with their direct experience of reevaluating the past (Dosse, 2008, p.223).

Ricœur believed that objectivity in historical work is always partial or truncated, and that historians must constantly balance imperfect objectivity with a subjectivity attuned to the insights of rigorous methods. This reflects his broader philosophical conviction on the issue of truth in general, recognizing the need for continuous revisions and adjustments, akin to revisionist practices in physics and cosmology (Ricœur, 1967, p.29).

Finally, Ricœur criticizes the positivist approach that dominated history in the 19th century, preferring a methodological approach inspired by the natural sciences. He particularly appreciates the efforts of the Annales School in this direction (Dosse, 2008, p.223).

Ricœur not only succeeded in reconciling his role as a historian with his mission as a philosopher, but he also introduced, especially towards the end of his writings, an element rarely noticed by historians: the element of "forgetting". He does not consider it merely a psychological or physiological phenomenon, but rather an ethical balance that allows for reconciling the demands of accurate memory and the objective writing of history. For Ricœur, as both a historian by profession and a responsible "citizen" tasked with defending collective memory, forgetting plays a crucial role in mitigating the burden of a painful past and opening avenues for tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Ricœur, 2005, pp.341-396).

In his discussions with historians, Ricœur remains committed to truth in the historical process. While he acknowledges structural intersections between historians and novelists in their respective writings, he emphasizes fidelity to documents and testimonies. Unlike the novelist, the historian must justify their assertions to a demanding audience requiring tangible evidence, which leads to great caution in language use and stylistic restraint. Despite his linguistic mastery, the historian remains tethered to the objective context of historical events, constrained by logics such as historical causality and direct references to real entities that define the identity of historical events (Ricœur, 2005, pp.341-396).

Ricœur (2005) thus presents an epistemological vision of history that grants it scientific legitimacy without compromising its artistic and literary dimensions—its rhetorical and imaginative aspects. His critical reading of historian Fernand Braudel's work demonstrates how the structural intersection between literary and scientific elements shapes historical production. Despite Braudel's intention to present scientifically advanced historical writing in his monumental work on "The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II," he could not escape the dominance of metaphor, imagination, and various rhetorical figures in expressing the substance of the dynamic relationship between geography (the Mediterranean), history, collective culture

(the Mediterranean world), and individual politics (Philip II) according to Ricœur (2009).

At this particular level, the importance of interpretation manifests as an essential methodological approach in historiographical work. The historian engages in interpretation not only to superficially explain events, but also to reconstruct this explanation in order to enable a deep and comprehensive understanding of the event. This reveals what Ricoeur (2009) calls "historical intentionality," where it becomes necessary to move to a higher level of historical consciousness, starting from the premise that historical truth is not simply theoretical, but fundamentally an indirect experience that the historian achieves as both a researcher and a citizen.

Thus, Ricoeur (2009) distinguishes himself from classical interpretative approaches that prefer to remain within the pure methodological framework of historical research, akin to Dilthey's interpretative methodological approach. In this sense, interpretation becomes a necessary mediation to reveal historical truth, not as a truth directly given in the document, but as a truth emerging from the complete historiographical process, from documentation to final writing, including phases of critique and investigation.

From this particular perspective, it becomes legitimate to consider the historical representation of an event, thus transforming historical discourse into a discourse of truth that simply asserts something about what actually happened. However, this assertion remains subject to the act of reading alone, granting truth a different representational framework compared to classical representational systems, notably those of the sciences of situation.

Ricoeur (2009) gradually guides us through various stages of interpretation towards a different representational system he terms "representation by proxy" or, in other words, "representation as proxy." Thus, the historian, through interpretation of the past, becomes a "deputy representative" acting on behalf of what is no longer present in reality, but only as a textual existence—that is, as a narrative subject.

For Ricoeur (2009), the field of historical writing thus represents a domain where representation ends and is replaced by representation as proxy, a crucial moment in the historiographical process where historical truth becomes

dependent on the text and the world in which this text is disseminated to readers. At this philosophical level, historical writing is how we interpret truth at the textual level, and what the historian presents with integrity deserves consideration as a criterion for arbitrating between interpretations and favoring the strongest among them.

Through this conceptual distinction between representation and representation as proxy, Ricoeur (2009) reinstates the importance of the concept of historical event and its ontological integrity, as well as what narrativists, particularly Anglo-Americans, have advanced. However, he refrains from blindly following their propositions, especially concerning their position on the relationship between history and narrative, due to the epistemological distinction between imagination and history. He emphasizes the requirement of "truth" that constitutes the heart of historical discourse, or rather the entire historical process itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between French historiography and philosophy has evolved from one of profound division to one of more integrated dialogue. Historians used to be aloof from the sort of philosophical frameworks embodied in the work of Hegel, but the appearance of the "new history" and the challenges to historical practice currently underway have encouraged the renewal of interest in the thinking of philosophers. Paul Ricoeur has done much to bridge the chasm, offering a hermeneutic approach that unites historical method with the philosopher's concern with issues of remembering, truth-telling, and interpretation. Ricoeur's theory of "representation as proxy" redescribes the role of the historian as an interpreter of the past in terms of the need to reconcile objectivity and subjectivity. The ongoing dialogue between history and philosophy has the added benefit of bringing both to higher understanding about the nature of historical knowledge and the ethics that surround it.

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